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ABSTRACT

This digest summarizes a full length report on preparing college students for citizenship responsibilities. The following questions are considered: What is citizenship and public life? What is higher education's role in educating for citizenship? and what are the skills for a renewed civic life?. The importance of citizens integrating their public and private lives for maximum social productivity is stressed. Higher education offers a setting, a curriculum, and an established community, all aimed at developing human beings for living in a public world. Three models can define the citizen's role: electoral-competitive, representative, and participatory democracy. Each model requires different attitudes, skills, and levels of participation. Colleges and universities can help students expand their notions of citizenship through the classroom structure, by providing opportunities for experiential learning, and in creating a campus community where all constituencies can think together about their shared lives. Includes 11 references (DB)

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Renewing Civic Capacity: Preparing College Students for Service and Citizenship

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What Is Citizenship and Public Life?

Citizenship is more than a legal construct with clearly defined individual rights and responsibilities. The concept goes beyond what we do and think as individuals to a common way of thinking about our shared interests and common life. When Alexis de Tocqueville visited America in 1831, he observed that:

> *These Americans are the most peculiar people in the world. You'll not believe it when I tell you how they behave. In a local community in their country, a citizen may conceive of some need [that] is not being met. What does he do? He goes across the street and discusses it with his neighbor. Then what happens? A committee begins functioning on behalf of that need. All of this is done by private citizens on their own initiative. The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens* (1956, p. 201).

It is this spirit of citizens conferring with citizens that is missing today.

This brand of direct democracy was built on the notion of the Greek *polis*, where the citizen's first priority was to participate in public life. While Americans never participated so directly, the New England town meeting, which Thomas Jefferson called "the wisest invention ever devised by man" (1903, vol. 8, p. 203), did allow for direct participation. While these early models excluded many individuals and lacked the balance between individual rights, they are helpful metaphorically, because citizenship today, despite the context of a highly technological, bureaucratic world, requires that individuals be knowledgeable of the public problems but, more important, have the capacity to act together toward their solutions. Modern citizenship requires participation in the public life almost by default. Our lives, no matter how individualistic, are affected by public decisions every day. The concept that individuals who are productive in society have an integrated private and public life is the foundation for building a new cadre of citizens.

The kind of public life we have depends on the kind of people we are. Tocqueville's account of his visit to America examined the American character today, which he called at times "habits of the heart." A retracing of Tocqueville's visit found that citizens today are people who have much in common and believe, despite the many obstacles, that community and commitment could be renewed in America (Bellah et al. 1985).

What Is Higher Education's Role in Educating for Citizenship?

A democratic citizenry, required by Thomas Jefferson, should be well educated and informed on the issues of the day, with the necessary skills to participate. Citizens must feel that they hold office in the country and have mastered a set of skills and competencies. Early American colleges considered "responsible citizenship" part of their mission as they developed learned gentlemen capable of providing informed leadership for the new country. With industrialization and urbanization of America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, emphasis shifted to preparing individuals with the specialized skills and knowledge to contribute to and guide the burgeoning America. Despite the waning interest, colleges and universities have a mandate to develop responsible citizens.

> *At its best, the campus is expected to bring together the views and experiences of all its points of view and create something greater than the sum, offering the prospect that personal values will be clarified and the channels of our common life will be deepened and renewed* (Boyer and Hechinger 1981, p. 56).

We must, however, find ways to balance individual needs and larger public purposes (Boyer 1988). Said another way, the challenge for education is to develop citizens. The issue is, how? A number of ways have very strong arguments and advocates. Six general categories can be used to frame the debate: (1) cultural traditions and classical education; (2) community and public service and experiential education; (3) studies of leadership; (4) general and liberal arts education; (5) civic or public leadership education; and (6) "other," which includes professional education, international studies, and philanthropy. These approaches to civic education are based on certain premises of the public life and democratic theory. Individuals learn about citizenship and its role in the public realm throughout their lives. Relearning new notions about citizenship will require new ways of thinking, relating, and acting. Higher education can help students develop civic skills and create the experience of civic life during very critical formative years.

This development can be encouraged in a variety of ways and in a number of places. Faculty, administrators, students, and the broader community can work together in defining what it means to be a civic community. What higher education offers to the process is a setting, a curriculum, and an established community, all aimed at developing human beings for living in a public world. It is important that the higher education community, in toto, think together about how to define, address, and develop the next generation of citizen leaders.

What Are the Skills for a Renewed Civic Life?

"Our political behavior depends on our idea of what democracy is, can be, and should be (Sartori 1987, p. 12). We learn our notions of it from our relationships and interactions with parents, teachers, peers, the media, and our history, and these impressions mold visions of democracy and determine how we see the citizen's role in

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relationship to it. Three models can be used to define that role: *electoral-competitive*, *representative*, and *participatory democracy*. Each requires different attitudes, skills, and levels of participation and interaction.

The more expansive model, participatory democracy, requires first and foremost active participation. It also requires the civic skills of public talk, public judgment, thinking, imagination, and the courage to act. Briefly, public talk requires that citizens have the ability to talk, listen, *and* act together for common purposes. What citizens learn from talking with each other are *new* ways of relating and working with others. Public talk is prerequisite for public judgment, which requires both thinking and imagining. "Judgment is the ability to bring principles to particulars without reducing the particulars to simple instances" (Minnich 1988, p. 33). Political judgment requires the ability to think together with others about what the right public course of action should be. It is not a solo activity; it requires that others be recognized and acknowledged in the process. "The journey from private opinion to political judgment does not follow a road from prejudices to true knowledge; it proceeds from solitude to sociability" (Barber 1988, p. 199). Public judgment is the capacity to think with others about collective lives and actions. It requires the ability to talk or imagine different viewpoints and perspectives with others.

College and university communities are in the special position of deciding what responsible citizenship requires in a democratic society and the skills that are required for it. To begin this process, conversations on campus must address these issues and how the curriculum can best inculcate them. Colleges and universities can help students to refine and expand their notions of citizenship and the common world through the classroom and how it is structured, by providing opportunities for experiential learning, and in creating a campus community where all constituencies can think together about their shared lives. The challenge, however, is not about what kind of curriculum, governance, or extracurricular activities are in place. It is about finding ways to solve the problems that face the world we share.

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